

For Immediate Release

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Rep. Herseth to Speak on House Floor About Ellsworth AFB

Expresses "Disappointment," and "Disagreement" with Pentagon Decision

May 16, 2005, Washington, DC – Tonight, U.S. Rep. Stephanie Herseth is scheduled to speak on the House floor about the Pentagon's recommendation to close Ellsworth Air Force Base. Herseth will express her disappointment at the decision and outline her reasoning for why the Base should be removed from the list. Her remarks also reference the South Dakota delegation's invitation to BRAC Chairman Principi to hold one of their regional field hearings in Rapid City.

Herseth will appear on C-SPAN between approximately 7:15pm and 7:30pm Central/ 6:15pm and 6:30pm Mountain.

Below are Herseth's prepared remarks:

U.S. Rep. Stephanie Herseth
May 16, 2005

Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to express my profound disappointment and flat disagreement in the Department of Defense's recommendation to close Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota as a part of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. This recommendation is as misguided as they come.

While the BRAC process is necessary to ensure that our armed forces can efficiently and adequately serve our military needs at home and abroad into the 21st Century, this decision does not accurately reflect the value of Ellsworth to that cause.

As Lead Wing for the Aerospace Expeditionary Force, the 28th Bomb Wing at Ellsworth Air Force Base played a decisive role in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. As they did in Kosovo and Afghanistan, the B-1 and her crews from Ellsworth Air Force Base performed superbly. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, B-1s played a vital role in helping liberate Iraq by dropping more than half the satellite guided munitions. Ellsworth once again demonstrated that it is the backbone of America's bomber fleet and the base has fulfilled its missions admirably.

This is a modern, well-equipped installation that has served our country for decades and is prepared to serve for decades to come. Ellsworth has substantially upgraded its infrastructure since the last round of base closures, which will allow Ellsworth to accept new missions and continue to grow. Rather than closing, Ellsworth is well situated to receive additional assignments.

In addition, Ellsworth's geographic and strategic strengths are many. Located in western South

Dakota, Ellsworth is strategically positioned and is not threatened by urban encroachment or crowded air space – major factors that have not been given appropriate weight by the Department. In addition, the base is close to bomber training facilities in the region.

I am also concerned that the Secretary of Defense did not adequately consider the benefits of locating military bases in rural regions. A disproportionate number of bases recommended for closure or realignment, resulting in a disproportionate number of lost jobs, are in rural states such as Alaska, Maine, North Dakota, South Dakota. This oversight is part and parcel of a continued disregard for not only the needs of rural America, but the unique value and strengths rural America offers to our country as a whole.

Additionally, commencing a round of base closures during a time of war is questionable strategy and could be harmful to our national security. The current round of domestic base closures should wait until after the Department of Defense completes its plans to bring troops back to the United States from overseas bases. I am also concerned about the risks associated with consolidating all of our B-1 bombers in a single location.

Furthermore, I am concerned that we are making base closure decisions prior to the Quadrennial Defense Review for 2005. The Quadrennial Defense Review analyzes force structure, modernization plans, military infrastructure, and the defense budget to help establish a roadmap for defense programs. It can not be ignored before assessing base realignments and closures.

Finally, the economic impact of closing Ellsworth Air Force Base on South Dakota would be dramatic. Our state would lose our second largest employer and an estimated \$278 million a year. The loss of nearly 4000 jobs would set South Dakota almost a year back in statewide job growth.

I have invited the Chairman of the BRAC Commission, Anthony Principi and other members of the Commission to visit Ellsworth Air Force Base and hold one of their regional field hearings at Rapid City, home to Ellsworth Air Force Base. A visit to Ellsworth will allow the Commission the opportunity to see what those of us from South Dakota already know – the B-1 Bomber and Ellsworth Air Force Base are irreplaceable and crucial to our national security.

As the BRAC Commission moves forward and reviews the Department of Defense's recommendations, I am confident the BRAC Commission will realize the Department of Defense deviated substantially from their established base closure criteria when recommending Ellsworth for closure and will support removing it from the list.

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